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ABSTRACT

Ten second grade students in a slow reading group were studied to compare the effects of basal and language experience instruction on word recognition skills. For four weeks, all the students received 90 minutes of basal instruction each morning. During the afternoon sessions, the five language experience students dictated and read stories related to the theme of the basal lesson, while the five remaining students continued to use only the basal instructional materials. Both groups were pre and posttested on 180 words in isolation. The data showed that the language experience group achieved 10% greater sight vocabulary than the basal group. Only 20% of the basal group exceeded the combined mean gain in word recognition for both groups (20.8), while 80% of the language experience group exceeded the mean. It appears that the language experience activities stimulated the children to use difficult words in the familiar, meaningful context of their own oral language, reinforcing the basal lessons. The language experience group also had the opportunity to interact with older partners (third grade students) during their afternoon sessions, an individualized approach to reading that resulted in more interest in reading. (RL)

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The Effectiveness of the Language Experience Approach as a Supplement to a Basal Reader Program

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Statement of the Problem

Can the sight vocabulary of a group of second-graders be increased through use of methods other than those used in their basal reader?

Ten second-graders identified as having difficulty in learning to read were placed in a reading series geared to slower learners. The children had insufficient sight vocabularies to succeed in silent reading. They were unable to work independently with the basal materials, but during teacher-directed activities they participated eagerly and showed good comprehension skills.

Significance of the Problem

All readers need a sight vocabulary. Word recognition must be immediate if it is not to interfere with comprehension. The basal materials present content and vocabulary which may or may not be meaningful to any given student. The basal vocabulary may include words in a student's listening and speaking vocabularies, which is important if the student is to learn to read the words. However, words which are not in a child's listening and speaking vocabulary, or words which are not emphasized in spoken language, may be difficult to read. For example some content words like <u>city</u> or <u>buildings</u> may not be meaningful for some rural children. Some function words may not be perceived as words in spoken language; for example: <u>and</u>, <u>a</u>, <u>or</u> may sound like 'n', uh, er in phrases such as "black 'n' white," "uh house", "one er the other."

The words must become meaningful in listening and speaking before the student can learn to read them.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the effect of the Language Experience Approach on acquiring sight vocabulary. The hypothesis was that the use of Language Experience activities as a supplement to the basal program would stimulate use of the sight words in the students' oral language and thus attach more meaning to the words as well as reinforce their introduction in the basal lesson.

HYPOTHESIS: There is no significant difference between the basal group and the Language Experience/basal group in number of new words recognized.

Assumptions and Limitations

The first assumption was that all children in the study had equivalent listening and speaking vocabularies. All were in second grade and had participated in the same reading program in first grade. Listening and speaking vocabularies were not tested. The only measurement of vocabulary increase was a word recognition test given at the beginning and end of the experiment.

The second limitation of the study was that the children had similar learning rates and styles. The researcher did not test individual interests and abilities before designing the activities used, because the Language Experience lessons corresponded broadly in theme to the basal stories. However, the children had the opportunity to choose the specific topics of dictation.

Definition of Terms

The sight vocabulary used was a list of one hundred-ten words obtained from the basal manual. (See Appendix)

Word recognition was defined as immediate oral response to the word in isolation as well as in context. The activities included practice of both kinds, while the testing only presented words in isolation.

The Language Experience activities began with individual sessions. The students dictated to the teacher, who recorded their stories and other entries in a notebook. The notebook also listed all sight words not in the child's reading vocabulary.

Gates (1947) states that if word recognition difficulties are eliminated, a child can understand any written material that he/she can understand in spoken form.

Durkin (1976) cautions teachers to differentiate between vocabulary and comprehension problems. She also acknowledges that teachers must teach the vocabulary of the basal if she is to successfully use the basal series. Durkin also emphasizes the importance of teaching function words in context, and of drawing attention to the discrepancies between oral and written language.

Karlin (1975) recommends presenting new words in context initially, and providing reinforcement exercises for speed in recognition. Karlin also includes working in partners as an activity to check word recognition.

Harris (1973) describes the Language Experience Approach as learning a new process (reading) through a familiar process (the child's own oral language). Another benefit, Harris maintains, is that Language Experience allows for more individualized instruction, and vertical grouping, than basal programs do.

Sylvia Ashton-Warner's key vocabulary concept was examined in a study of disadvantaged first-graders in four U. S. cities. The vocabulary children asked to learn (key vocabulary) was compared with the vocabulary of various basal series. The two vocabularies were found to be significantly different. The results of the study suggested that the key vocabulary of

children may be more effective than the basal vocabulary in teaching all the language arts because it is more meaningful to children. Packer (1970).

Thorn (1969) advises teachers to relate language activities to the main themes of basal lessons. The processes of oral discussion and composition reinforce the lesson, and encourage children to accept learning new words as a part of reading, and eliminate the need to meet these words prior to reading.

A group of deprived first-graders composed a daily Language Experience story related to school activities. The vocabulary was more controlled and repetitive than that of a general experience chart. The children were successful in learning pre-primer words, and in learning other language skills. Their performance was attributed to the daily story. (Burt, 1970).

A study of third grade remedial readers compared two groups of students. One group dictated and read Language Experience stories, and the other group read from basal readers. Both groups used the same audio-visual materials. The Language Experience group had a 22% greater sight vocabulary. While 62% of the Language Experience group exceeded the combined mean gain of 20 words, only 36% of the basal group exceeded the mean. (Kelly, 1975).

In 1966, Stauffer conducted a study comparing the Language Arts and Basic Reader approaches to first-grade reading instruction. The population of 528 subjects was located in 3

Delaware towns. Twenty classrooms were studied. The Language Arts groups scored significantly higher than the Basic Reader groups on word recognition.

A study of the same population further examined the effects of the two methods of instruction on second-graders. A total of 389 students in 20 classrooms in Delaware participated. The experimental (Language Arts) population scored significantly higher on the Gates Word-Recognition Test. (Stauffer and Hammond, 1967).

The following year 22 third-grade classrooms in Delaware, with a total of 576 students, were involved in the continuation of this longitudinal study. On the Gates Advanced Primary Reading Tests the Language Arts group did not score significantly higher than the Basic Reader group. This was the pattern for the group administered tests. However, on two individually administered word recognition tests the Language Arts population had significantly higher scores.

Procedures Used

For four weeks ten second-graders received the same basal reading instruction ninety minutes each morning. During the sixty-minute afternoon reading class five students used basal materials and five dictated and read Language Experience stories. Both groups had access to the library during this hour.

The basal group read from the reader, the workbook, and library books. They completed worksheets accompanying the basal, and they studied 180 word cards. These children read orally to the teacher individually from the reader. The teacher checked their progress with the word cards occasionally.

The Language Experience group dictated individually to the teacher every Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. The dictations were stories, lists, or informational entries which were related to the main themes of the basal lessons. The teacher selected the basic topic, but the students' entries revealed a wide range of specific ideas. All work was recorded in a notebook, which also contained a list of words not currently in a student's sight vocabulary. Before and after dictating, the students read silently from their readers, library books, or notebooks. They illustrated their dictated entries and made copies to take home. Each had a third-grade partner (the study took place in a split-grade class) to whom he/she read selections from the notebook. Then the third-

grader checked the second-grader on word recognition from his/her word list. On Thursdays and Fridays the students read orally to the teacher from their notebooks. The teacher also checked their word recognition from their individual lists.

Sources of Data

The population consisted of ten second-graders ranging in age from 7.5 years to 9.1 years. These students were chosen for the study because of their placement in a reading program designed for children who have experienced difficulty in learning to read. There were five girls and five boys in the population. All ten children were white. All were members of a rural, middle class community. Mental age and any academic scores were not examined during the study.

The experimental (Language Experience) and control (basal) groups were chosen randomly. The experimental group ranged in age from 7.5 years to 9.1 years. The control group ranged from 7.5 years to 8.5 years. The experimental group consisted of three girls and two boys, while the control group included two girls and three boys.

Methods of Gathering Data

Before the experiment, each child in the total population was tested individually by the teacher on recognition of 180 sight words listed in the basal teacher's manual. The words were printed on oaktag cards. The teacher revealed each card to a child as the child responded orally. The teacher recorded the number of words correctly identified by

each child. Additionally the words not recognized were recorded in list form, and this list was included in the experimental group's notebooks. At the conclusion of the study, this process was repeated and the scores were recorded.

Description of Data--Gathering Instruments Used

The pre-test and post-test for word-recognition were exactly the same. The list of 180 vocabulary words was printed on individual cards and these were used for testing at the beginning and end of the experiment. These cards were also used by the control group for practice activities.

LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE GROUP

Subject	Initial Score	Final Score	Words Gained
A	153	175	22
B	137	164	27
C	101	121	20
D	109	145	36
E	136	161	25

BASAL GROUP

Subject	Initial Score	Final Score	Words Gained
A	123	135	12
B	135	147	12
C	121	143	22
D	106	124	18
E	125	139	14

Restatement of Problem

A group of second-graders in a slow reading group were studied to compare the effects of basal and Language Experience instruction on word recognition skills.

Description of Procedures

The basal group received 90 minutes of basal instruction each morning and 60 minutes of basal instruction each afternoon. The Language Experience group participated in the same basal group in the morning, but in the afternoon they dictated and read stories and other selections related to the theme of the basal lesson. Each member of the Language Experience population read to a third-grade partner who also checked their word recognition. Both groups were tested before and after the experiment on 180 words in isolation.

Major Findings

1. The Language Experience group had a sight vocabulary which was 10% greater than the Basal Group.
2. The combined mean gain in word recognition for both groups was 20.8 words. While only 20% of the Basal Group exceeded the mean, 80% of the Language Experience group exceeded the mean.

Conclusions

The Language Experience activities stimulated the children to use sight words in their own oral language first. Later when they read their own compositions they met the sight words in a familiar, meaningful context. This process reinforced

the basal lesson, where the children had encountered the words in a new context. The Language Experience group had the opportunity to interact with older partners and to share their creations with them. This individualized approach to reading resulted in more interest in reading. The basal group studied the same material and all 180 sight words, while the Language Experience group had a variety of learning activities, and studied only the words which were difficult for them.

Recommendations for Further Investigation

The effect of Language Experience activities on self-concept should be considered because of the interest and pride shown by the children after dictation. Children with adequate oral language seem to benefit by approaching reading through their strengths. Children with inadequate oral language seem to improve in organizing their spoken phrases and sentences after dictating for a few weeks. These two areas of study are appropriate for future examination.

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Appendix A

Basal series:

Scott, Foresman, and Company
Open Highways
More Power - Level 2-1

Sight Vocabulary:

a
about
again
all
am
an
and
are
ask
at
away

back
ball
bark
barn
be
bed
big
birds
black
book
boy
but
buy
by

cake
came
can
can't
car
cat
children
come
could
cut

did
do
does

dog
don't
door
down
duck

eat
elephant
every

farm
father
find
first
five
fly
for
fun
funny

game
gave
get
girl
give
go
going
good
got
guess

had
hand
happy
has
hat
have
he
help
hen
her

here
his
him
home
house
hurt

I
if
in
is
it

jump
just

know

laugh
let
like
little
look

make
man
may
me
men
mother
much
my

nest
new
no
not
now

of
off

old
on
one
or
out
park
pet
pig
play
please
put

ran
read
red
ride
road
run

said
saw
say
school
see
she
sit
sleep
so
some
something
soon
stop
street

take
tell
ten
that
the
them
then

there
they
this
three
time
to
too
train
trees
try
two

up
us
use

very

want
was
we
well
went
were
what
when
which
who
will
wish
with
work
would

yes
you
your

Appendix B

Sample Unit

The basal story is "Excitement on Appleby Street". It tells about a little boy named Joey who loses his tooth down a manhole. When a water pipe breaks, he thinks the following excitement is because of his tooth. He returns home, and his father explains what happened, and aids that a tooth under the street works as well as one under a pillow. Joey wishes for goldfish and his wish comes true.

Activity 1 - The children were asked to tell the story in their own words.

> "Joey was walking down Appleby Street when he saw a manhole. He looked in it. His loose tooth fell out. He wanted to get his tooth back, but he couldn't because the men came and started to dig. He thought that he wouldn't get his tooth back. Then the men hit a water pipe. He wished for some goldfish and he got them."

Activity 2 - The children were asked to remember what happened when they lost a tooth.

> "I lost my tooth at school. I was playing tackle football. I ran the football, and Matt hit my mouth, and my tooth fell out into the grass. Now I can't find my tooth. I wished for some money and I got it. I got the money from the tooth fairy. It was under my bedsheet."

Activity 3 - The children happened to visit the dental clinic this week! So they told about their experiences at the clinic.

"He x-rayed my teeth. He squirted water with a mechanical gun and he put like a camera on my cheek. He looked in my mouth with a mirror on a stick. And he stuck a needle in my molar. He said I didn't have no cavities. Today I got a loose tooth. The day I went to the dentist's I didn't have a loose tooth."